

Introduction In orientatalism.

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Orientalism is a 1978 book by Edward W. Said, in which the author establishes the eponymous term "Orientalism" as a critical concept to describe the West's common, contemptuous depiction and portrayal of "The East," i.e. the Orient. Societies and peoples of the Orient are those who inhabit the places of Asia, North Africa, and the Middle East. Said argues that Orientalism, in the sense of the Western scholarship about the Eastern World, is inextricably tied to the imperialist societies who produced it, which makes much Orientalist work inherently political and servile to power.[1]

According to Said, in the Middle East, the social, economic, and cultural practices of the ruling Arab elites indicate they are imperial satraps who have internalized a romanticized version of Arab Culture created by French, British and later, American, Orientalists. Examples used in the book include critical analyses of the colonial literature of Joseph Conrad, which conflates a people, a time, and a place into one narrative of an incident and adventure in an exotic land.[2]

Through the critical application of post-structuralism in its scholarship, Orientalism influenced the development of literary theory, cultural criticism, and the field of Middle-Eastern studies, especially with regards to how academics practice their intellectual inquiries when examining, describing, and explaining the Middle East.[3] Moreover, the scope of Said's scholarship established Orientalism as a foundational text in the field of postcolonial studies, by denoting and examining the connotations of Orientalism, and the history of a given country's post-colonial period.[4]

As a public intellectual, Edward Said debated historians and scholars of area studies, notably, historian Bernard Lewis, who described the thesis of Orientalism as "anti-Western." [5] For subsequent editions of Orientalism, Said wrote an Afterword (1995)[6] and a Preface (2003)[7] addressing discussions of the book as cultural criticism.

"Orientalism"

The term orientalism denotes the exaggeration of difference, the presumption of Western superiority, and the application of clichéd analytical models for perceiving the Oriental world. As such, Orientalism is the pivotal source of the inaccurate cultural representations that form the foundations of Western thought and perception of the Eastern world, specifically in relation to the Middle East region.

An academic tradition or field;
a worldview, representation, and "style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between 'the Orient' and (most of the time) 'the Occident';" and as a powerful political instrument of domination.
The principal characteristic of Orientalism is a "subtle and persistent Eurocentric prejudice against Arab-Islamic peoples and their culture," which derives from Western images of what is Oriental (i.e., cultural representations) that reduce the Orient to the fictional essences of "Oriental peoples" and "the places of the Orient;" such representations dominate the discourse of Western peoples with and about non-Western peoples.

These cultural representations usually depict the 'Orient' as primitive, irrational, violent, despotic, fanatic, and essentially inferior to the westerner or native informant, and hence, 'enlightenment' can only occur when "traditional" and "reactionary" values are replaced by "contemporary" and "progressive" ideas that are either western or western-influenced.[9]

Cultural background:

In practice, the imperial and colonial enterprises of the West are facilitated by collaborating régimes of Europeanized Arab élites who have internalized the fictional, and romanticized representations of Arabic culture. The idea of the "Orient" was conceptualized by French and English Orientalists during the 18th century, and was eventually adopted in the 20th century by American Orientalists.[10][11] As such, Orientalist stereotypes of the cultures of the Eastern world have served, and continue to serve, as implicit justifications for the colonial ambitions and the imperial endeavors of the U.S. and the European powers. In that vein, about contemporary Orientalist stereotypes of Arabs and Muslims

Orientalism (1978) proposes that much of the Western study of Islamic civilization was an exercise in political intellectualism; a psychological exercise in the self-affirmation of "European identity"; not an objective exercise of intellectual enquiry and the academic study of Eastern cultures. Therefore, Orientalism was a method of practical and cultural discrimination that was applied to non-European societies and peoples in order to establish European imperial domination. In justification of empire, the Orientalist claims to know more—essential and definitive knowledge—about the Orient than do the Orientals.[8]:2–3 Western writings about the Orient, the perceptions of the East presented in Orientalism, cannot be taken at face value, because they are cultural representations based upon fictional, Western images of the Orient. The history of European colonial rule and political domination of Eastern civilizations, distorts

the intellectual objectivity of even the most knowledgeable, well-meaning, and culturally sympathetic Western Orientalist; thus did the term "Orientalism" become a pejorative word regarding non-Western peoples and cultures.

Occidental and Oriental origins

Said said that the Western world sought to dominate the Eastern world for more than 2,000 years, since Classical antiquity (8th c. BC – AD 6th c.), the time of the play *The Persians* (472 BC), by Aeschylus, which celebrates a Greek victory (Battle of Salamis, 480 BC) against the Persians in the course of the Persian Wars (499–449 BC)—imperial conflict between the Greek West and the Persian East.[8]:1–2[16] Europe's long, military domination of Asia (empire and hegemony) made unreliable most Western texts about the Eastern world, because of the implicit cultural bias that permeates most Orientalism, which was not recognized by most Western scholars.

In the course of empire, after the physical-and-political conquest, there followed the intellectual conquest of a people, whereby Western scholars appropriated for themselves (as European intellectual property) the interpretation and translation of Oriental languages, and the critical study of the cultures and histories of the Oriental world.[17] In that way, by using Orientalism as the intellectual norm for cultural judgement, Europeans wrote the history of Asia, and invented the "exotic East" and the "inscrutable Orient", which are cultural representations of peoples and things considered inferior to the peoples and things of the West.[18]

The Other:

Orientalism concludes that "Western knowledge of the Eastern world," i.e. orientalism, fictionally depicts the Orient as an irrational, psychologically weak, and feminized, non-European 'Other', which is negatively contrasted with the rational, psychologically strong, and masculine West. Such a binary relation, in a hierarchy of weakness and strength, derives from the European psychological need to create a difference of cultural inequality, between West and East, which inequality is attributable to "immutable cultural essences" inherent to Oriental peoples and things.[8]:65–7

The notion of an Orient has played a central role in constructing European culture, and "helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience." [8]:1–2 The binary relationship of strong-West-and-weak-East reinforces the cultural stereotypes invented with literary, cultural, and historical texts that are more fictitious than factual; yet, which give the reader of Orientalist texts (history, travelogue, anthropology, etc.) a limited understanding of life in the Middle East, because Orientalism conflates the different societies of the Eastern world, into the homogeneous world of "the Orient.